

# Libraries as Knowledge Armories: Can They Combat the Weaponisation of Social Media?

Edmont Pasipamire

Rosebank International University College, South Africa

[epasipamire@rosebankcollege.co.za](mailto:epasipamire@rosebankcollege.co.za)

**Abstract:** The rapid spread of misinformation, algorithmic manipulation and artificial intelligence-generated fake content on social media has sparked growing interest in whether libraries can serve as the first line of defense for information integrity. Despite widespread advocacy for libraries to be repositories of knowledge, the evidence base for this claim has remained largely unexplored. This review addresses a central question: to what extent can academic and public libraries act as effective institutional bulwarks against the weaponisation of social media, and what structural factors determine the limits of this capacity? To answer this question, 32 peer-reviewed and institutional sources from library science, communication studies, security research and education are combined in five thematic areas: how and to what extent disinformation spreads; whether media literacy programs will lead to lasting behavioural change; institutional capacity of libraries; the validation infrastructure; and the context of political and geographical contexts. The findings show that, while libraries are trustworthy institutions with real teaching capacity, four structural barriers limit their effectiveness: chronic under-funding and under-staffing; the persistent gap between the development of verification skills and changing online behaviour; the poor transferability of literacy tools in authoritarian and conflict-affected contexts; and the fundamental mismatch between AI-driven fabrication and library response capacity. The framing of libraries as the primary defenders of information war is also a risk of diverting political attention from more consequential interventions, such as platform liability, AI-regulation of content, and national disinformation strategies. This review contributes to a critical reassessment of the claims on library effectiveness, a typology of four structural capacity bottlenecks and a framework for including libraries as essential but limited actors in the wider, societal response to the weaponisation of information in democratic life.

**Keywords:** Disinformation, Digital Literacy, Information Weaponisation, Library Information Services, Media Literacy Education, Fact-Checking Infrastructure

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## 1. Introduction and Background

Disinformation on social media is a major and persistent problem. False information is rapidly spread by bots, forgery, and algorithms that foster emotional content (Surjatmodjo et al., 2024; Morais et al., 2025). Research shows that false information travels more rapidly than true information (Shah et al., 2025). The rise of generative artificial intelligence has exacerbated this situation by enabling rapid creation of large amounts of realistic fake content. Libraries are often considered as trustworthy institutions which can help combat misinformation through information literacy and community education (Jahangir, 2025; Sullivan, 2019). However, it is still not clear whether these efforts are effective, who benefits from them and whether they can be scaled up. There are three main problems. First, misinformation is spreading on a scale far beyond the reach of libraries (Willenborg & Detmering, 2025). Second, even when people learn information literacy skills, they often fail to apply them in real life situations (Katouinou et al., 2025). Third, there is no clear consensus on whether libraries should remain neutral or actively participate in the fight against misinformation (Roncaglia, 2018). This review is important because current research often overstates the potential of libraries. A more critical analysis is needed to understand their true contribution and to highlight the need for more comprehensive solutions, such as regulation of platforms and government intervention. The review focuses on five areas: evaluation of library interventions, the use of artificial intelligence, community partnerships, the role of librarians and the different approaches to training.

### 1.1 Rationale of the Study

Librarians are increasingly recognised as important in the fight against misinformation, as they are trustworthy, community-based and encourage access to information. They can also support people with digital skills or access to them. But there is little hard evidence that library programs really change people's behavior, whether they are sufficient to address the scale of disinformation, or how they compare with more comprehensive solutions like government policies and platform regulation. Many studies point to the positive role of libraries, but only a few critically assess their real impact on society. Therefore, this study is necessary to ensure a clear and balanced overview. It will examine what libraries are doing well, where there are gaps and how their role fits into wider efforts to tackle misinformation at a more systemic level.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Social media are increasingly used to disseminate false information through coordinated campaigns, artificial intelligence-generated content and algorithms on the platform that promote sensational content. Studies show that false information spreads much more rapidly than true information (Shah et al., 2025) and that verification efforts are slow and limited (Morris et al., 2025). The rise of generative artificial intelligence has exacerbated this problem by allowing for the rapid creation of persuasive fake content, including deepfakes (Surjatmodjo et al., 2024). Libraries are often considered important in the fight against misinformation through the promotion of information literacy and community involvement (Jahangir, 2025; Sullivan, 2019). However, there is little clear evidence that these efforts have led to lasting changes in behaviour or that they have been sufficient to tackle the scale of the problem. This study addresses the lack of critical research into the effectiveness of library strategies, their limitations and how they should be integrated into the broader response to misinformation. Without such understanding, resources can be misused, libraries overloaded, and professions can struggle to balance neutrality with active engagement in the fight against misinformation (Jahangir, 2025; Roncaglia, 2018; Johnston, 2023).

## 1.3 Research Objectives

This review is organised around five specific research objectives, each addressing a distinct dimension of library counter-disinformation capacity:

- RO1: To what extent do library-led information literacy interventions produce measurable, lasting changes in individuals' ability to identify and resist disinformation on social media?
- RO2: How is artificial intelligence being integrated into library counter-disinformation programs, and what are the practical barriers to effective AI adoption?
- RO3: What roles do community partnerships and multi-institutional networks play in enhancing the sustainability and reach of library counter-disinformation efforts?
- RO4: How are professional identity and the librarian neutrality debate shaping the capacity of libraries to engage actively with information disorder?
- RO5: Which instructional formats and training approaches are most effective in promoting media literacy, and which populations remain underserved by current library programming?

## 2. Methodology

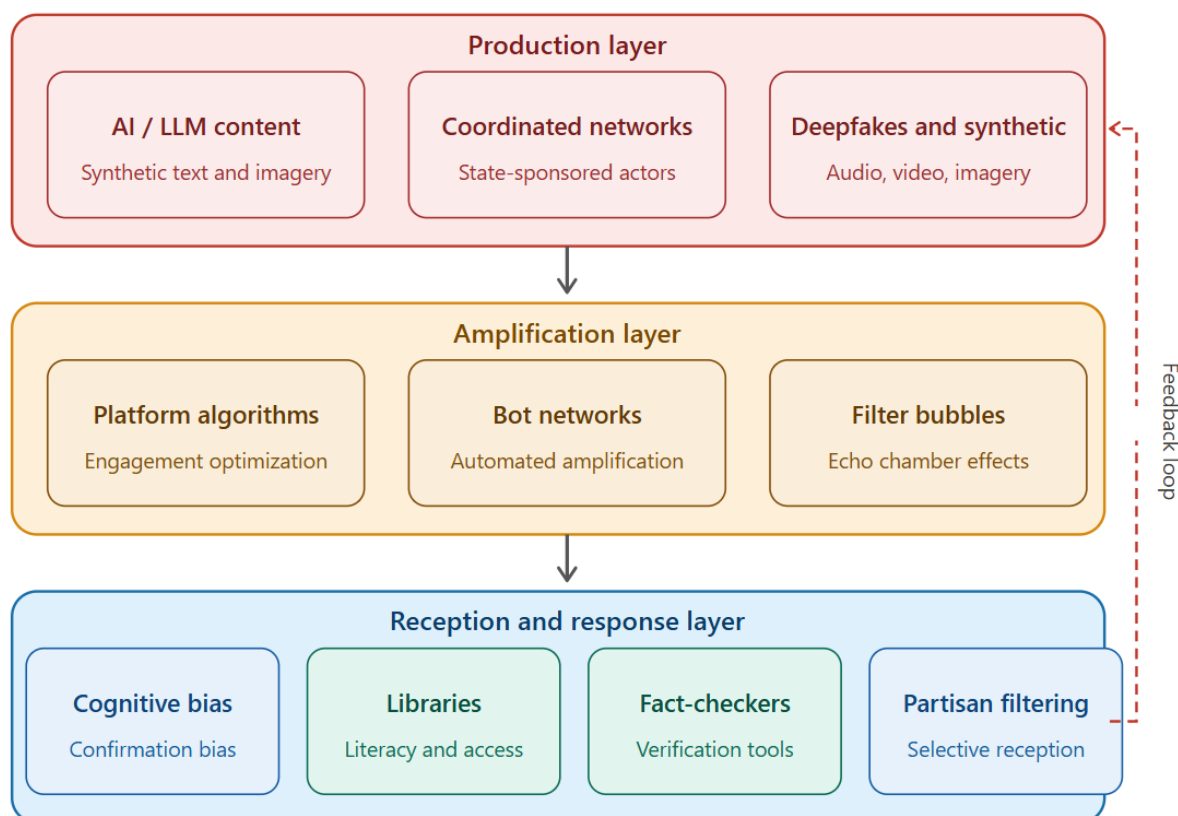
This study uses a comprehensive, critically oriented literature review based on 32 peer-reviewed and institutional sources published from 2017 to 2026. The sources included were from Scopus, the Web of Science, Google Scholar, LISA, ERIC, and communication abstracts, where the search strings combining the terms library, disinformation, media literacy, fact-checking, and information warfare were used to cover the role of libraries in countering disinformation, AI-generated disinformation, and institutional responses to information disorder. The initial pool of approximately 310 sources was reduced to a final 32 by eliminating sources which were only narrowly technical, duplicated or did not have an institutional analysis. The analytical approach is a critical thematic synthesis (Ogunlana & Omachi, 2024), mapping explicitly the areas of convergence, divergences and evidentiary gaps, rather than simply cataloguing the activities of the libraries.

## 3. The Disinformation Landscape: Scale, Mechanism, and Why Libraries Face a Structural Problem

Disinformation unlike misinformation, which spreads unintentionally is deliberately fabricated and strategically disseminated to deceive (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). As illustrated in **Figure 1**, it operates across three interdependent layers: production, amplification, and reception. At the production layer, AI-generated content, coordinated inauthentic networks, and deepfakes have drastically lowered the cost of creating convincing falsehoods (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). These materials are then amplified through platform algorithms, bot networks, and filter bubbles that prioritise engagement over accuracy — causing false content to spread approximately six times faster than corrections (Vosoughi et al., 2018). By the time individuals encounter disinformation at the reception layer, repeated exposure has already inflated its perceived credibility through illusory truth effects (Pennycook et al., 2018), making post-hoc debunking structurally inefficient. As **Figure 1** highlights, libraries represent one of the few institutional response points at the reception layer — alongside fact-checkers — yet they operate at human speed against a machine-speed production and amplification

system. Their episodic, workshop-based interventions and voluntary attendance models are poorly matched to the always-on platforms where disinformation circulates (Tripodi et al., 2023). This scalability mismatch, compounded by resource constraints and professional neutrality norms (Johnston, 2023), frames the structural problem this review examines across the five objectives that follow.

### The disinformation amplification ecosystem



**Figure 1: The Disinformation Amplification Ecosystem — production, amplification, and reception/response layers**

### 3.1 AI-Generated Disinformation and Systemic Amplification

The combination of generative artificial intelligence (AI) and engagement-driven social media has created an uneven and imbalanced information environment that challenges traditional institutional responses. While existing studies highlight the ability of large-scale language models to produce persuasive and misleading content (Shah et al., 2025; Tomassi et al., 2024; Surjatmodjo et al., 2024), they often pay less attention to how this content is amplified by platform algorithms that favour emotional, polarising material—making disinformation spread more easily. As shown in Figure 1, disinformation operates across three stages: creation, amplification, and reception. However, this model can be too simplistic if it ignores feedback loops, where user engagement (such as sharing or commenting) increases visibility and encourages further production of similar content. Evidence from Morais et al. (2025) shows the scale of the problem but also highlights a key limitation: fact-checking efforts rely heavily on limited human expertise, making it difficult to keep up. In this context, library interventions are often seen as valuable but not critically assessed in relation to the scale of the problem. The evidence suggests a mismatch—not because these interventions are poorly designed, but because slower, human-centred approaches struggle to keep pace with fast, automated, and algorithm-driven disinformation systems.

### 3.2 Ideological Resistance and the Limits of Information Correction

The problem is not only the extent of the disinformation; it is also the way people act. Research shows that people with strong political convictions often ignore or reject corrections, regardless of their accuracy or plausibility (Oeldorf-Hirsch et al., 2023). Library programs tend to focus on teaching people how to assess sources, in the expectation that this will help them to assess information more accurately. But this approach

does not work if the misinformation is based on people's faith and identity rather than skills (Singh, 2024). As a result, these programs can help those who are already good at spotting disinformation, but they are less effective in reaching those most at risk

## **4. Library Capacity: Evidence, Limits, and the Intention-Behaviour Gap**

### **4.1 What the Evidence Actually Shows**

The empirical literature on digital literacy interventions in libraries documents the real short-term benefits. Meena (2024) reports an average post-evaluation improvement of 23 percent in information literacy programmes, and Herrera-Diz and López-Rufino (2021) identify public and university libraries as the dominant institutional actors in the world for information literacy programming, with 64 percent of respondents preferring models based on self-learning. The positive correlation between the level of information literacy and the level of fact-checking behaviour is documented in various contexts (Eshiet, 2025; Kurniasih et al., 2024), and the ACRL and SIFT model - a four-step verification process (Stop, Investigate the Source, Find More Coverage, Trace the Claims - provide a structured pedagogy framework) - is proven to be effective (Hanz & Kingsland, 2020). Interactive and gamified formats consistently outperform didactic instant-feedback training. The Escape Room proposals involve practice in emotionally realistic scenarios, which generate more critical thinking than traditional workshops (Cho et al., 2023), while the Socio-cultural Game-Based Approach addresses the emotional and social dimensions of the consumption of misinformation, which are often neglected in classroom instruction (Wedlake et al., 2024).

### **4.2 The Intention-Behaviour Gap: Why Skill Gains May Not Transfer**

A key unresolved problem for literacy-based approaches is the gap between intention and behaviour. Even well-educated individuals who are concerned about disinformation and report that they intend to verify information often fail to do so in practice, especially when content is emotional or shaped by algorithms (Katsaounidou et al., 2025). This reflects how information is typically consumed quickly, emotionally, and within social environments that reward sharing rather than verification. Current research does not provide strong evidence that library training leads to lasting behaviour change. Most studies rely on short-term pre- and post-assessments, which measure performance in controlled settings rather than real-world behaviour on social media. For instance, the 23% improvement reported by Meena (2024) may reflect temporary learning rather than sustained change. This represents a central weakness in the evidence base. Furthermore, important populations are underrepresented. Adults outside formal education identified as a key group for building societal resilience to misinformation are largely absent from the literature (Boler et al., 2024).

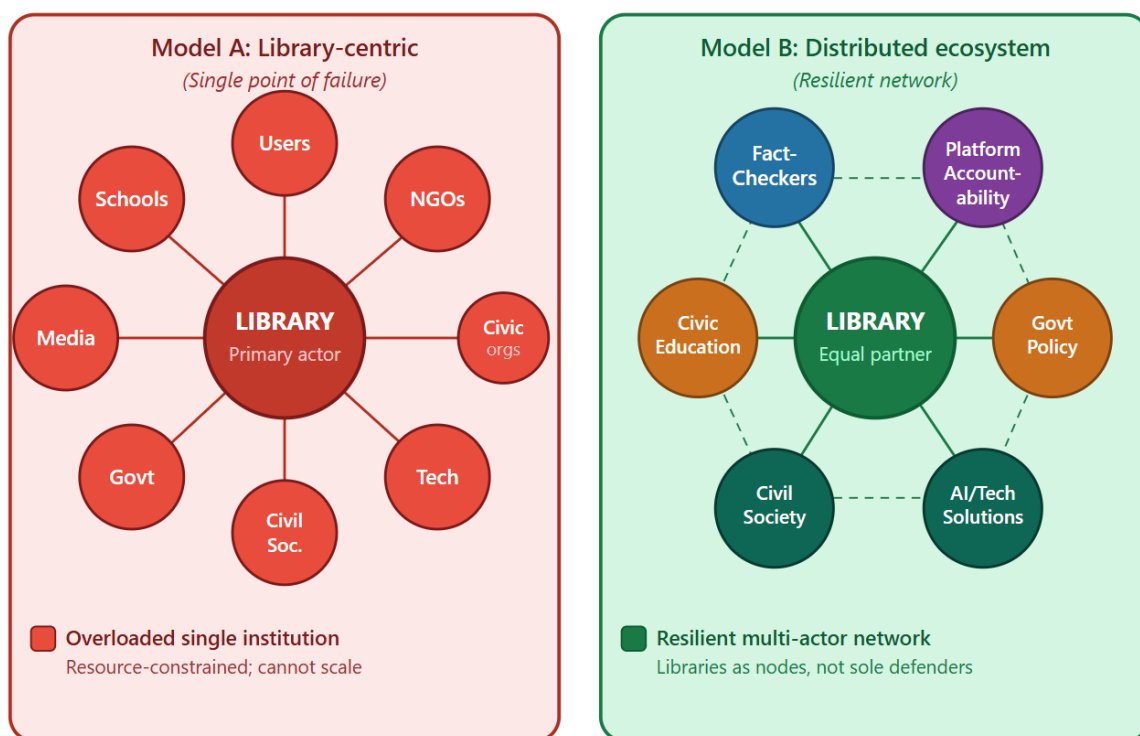
### **4.3 AI Integration: Promise Without Operational Proof**

The integration of AI in library disinformation services remains largely conceptual. The proposed applications include automated factchecking, personalised chatbots for reading literacy and real-time monitoring of content (Crivello, 2025; Salubi & Salubi, 2025). Of these, only automated detection approaches were empirically evaluated in the context of libraries (Tomassi et al., 2024) and the results are qualified: detection systems are reactive to known manipulation techniques and vulnerable to counter-measures by reactive institutional defenders. Practical implementation is further hampered by the fact that 56 percent of librarians cite a lack of staff training as a major obstacle and 52 percent cite budgetary constraints on validation technologies (Jahangir, 2025). AI tools cannot at present serve as a primary mechanism for libraries to counter disinformation; they are, at best, an additional capability available to a minority of well-funded institutions.

## **5. Partnerships, Professional Identity, and Verification Ecosystems**

One of the most striking findings of this review is that libraries are best served when operating as part of a network rather than as stand-alone institutions. Figure 2 illustrates this contrast starkly: a library-centric model, where one institution is primarily responsible for counter-disinformation work, is inherently fragile, because its effectiveness depends on a single node. If this node is faced with cuts in resources, staff turnover, or simply overwhelmed by the amount of misinformation in the air, the whole response collapses. The distributed ecosystem model, in which libraries, fact-checking organizations, government agencies, civil society groups, and educational institutions all play limited but complementary roles, is much more resilient. No single failure point can derail the entire system. The evidence examined in this section consistently supports the distributed model

and shows why the library-centred alternative is neither sustainable nor adequate for the scale of the disinformation problem.



**Figure 2: Library-Centric vs. Distributed Ecosystem Model — single-node fragility versus network resilience**

### 5.1 Community Engagement: What Works and What Limits It

Literature shows that efforts by libraries to combat disinformation are more effective when undertaken in partnership with other organisations rather than on their own. Studies in Ukraine show that working with non-governmental organisations, schools and government agencies enables libraries to reach more people and to implement more intensive programs (Haigh et al., 2021). Similarly, US research suggests that long-term trust building and cooperation with community organisations leads to more durable results than short, isolated workshops (Tripodi et al., 2023). This shows that the success of these initiatives is less dependent on the library itself and more dependent on the partnership it has built. Moreover, participatory approaches, in which communities help to design programmes, seem to be more effective than top-down methods, as they are more responsive to local needs (Henderson & Tribelhorn, 2026). Evidence from Taiwan further supports this claim by showing that large-scale success in fighting disinformation is due to coordinated networks of various institutions, including fact-checking bodies, educators, and civil society groups (Chang & Lin, 2026). What matters is that the model works because responsibility is shared throughout society, not because a single institution, such as a library, has more capacity. This highlights the main limitation of library-based approaches when implemented separately. Despite these strengths, the literature reveals a fundamental weakness in the area of sustainability. Many partnerships rely on short-term funding and lack long-term support structures, limiting their impact over the long term (Sanchez et al., 2024). Some libraries are trying to extend their reach via social media, but this strategy poses new risks because it relies on algorithms on the platform that favour engagement over accuracy (Siregar et al., 2025). Overall, although cooperation increases efficiency, the literature does not adequately address how such partnerships can be maintained, and there is a considerable gap between research and practice.

### 5.2 Professional Identity: The Unresolved Neutrality Debate

Literature shows that the shift in the identity of the librarian is not yet complete but is still uncertain and uneven. Scholars argue that librarians become civic educators with a responsibility to promote democracy (Ayre, 2016; Sullivan, 2019). However, this idea often assumes that libraries have the strength and resources to assume this role, which is not always the case. Although some studies show that librarians are embracing this new role (Adewojo et al., 2024), this is an exaggeration of what they can do. The debate on neutrality is also not yet

resolved. Roncaglia (2018) presents neutrality as a choice between remaining neutral or actively combating disinformation, but in practice it is often shaped by institutional rules and a fear of risk. Johnston (2023) shows that libraries are often cautious, limiting the extent to which they can engage in open dialogue. At the same time, Willenborg and Detmering (2025) point out that many libraries lack staff, resources and support, which makes it difficult to assume a more expansive role. Vicente (2024) adds that professional ethics and training have not yet been adapted to deal effectively with disinformation. The ideas of one-stop-shop fragility and distributed resilience suggest that librarians should not be expected to deal with misinformation on their own. Instead, they should work as part of a broader network and concentrate on what they do best, such as teaching information literacy and providing access to resources. This approach reduces pressure on libraries, but it also depends on a strong cooperation, which is not always forthcoming. Overall, the literature shows that the shift towards a civic role of librarians is still a work in progress. It is shaped not only by new ideas, but also by the limitations of the real world to which libraries are able to apply.

## 6. Results

Table 1 summarises the findings against the five research objectives of the 32 sources examined. The quality of the evidence shall be assessed on the basis of three criteria: validity of the measurement (whether the results reflect changes in behaviour rather than self-reported or post-test performance), longitudinal validity (whether effects are monitored beyond the immediate post-intervention period), and generalizability (whether the samples and context support a wider inference). No single objective area fulfils all three criteria; objectives 1 and 5 have the strongest empirical bases, but both fail to measure longitudinal depth. Objectives 2, 3 and 4 are mainly supported by qualitative, conceptual or narrative evidence.

**Table 1: Summary of findings against research objectives**

Objective	Key findings	Evidence quality
<b>O1</b> Intervention effectiveness	23% avg post-assessment improvement (Meena, 2024); interactive formats strongest (Cho et al., 2023; Wedlake et al., 2024); no longitudinal behavioral evidence; intention-behavior gap documented (Katsaounidou et al., 2025).	<b>Moderate</b> Short-term only; no RCTs.
<b>O2</b> AI integration	Automated factchecking and chatbots proposed (Crivellaro, 2025; Salubi & Salubi, 2025); rare operational deployment; staff training (56%) and resource deficits primary barriers (Jhangir, 2025); adversarial circumvention limits detection reliability.	<b>Low-Moderate</b> Conceptual frameworks dominate.
<b>O3</b> Community partnerships	Multi-stakeholder models most impactful (Haigh et al., 2021; Tripodi et al., 2023); participatory design improves relevance (Henderson & Tribelhorn, 2026); partnerships mostly ad hoc, lacking sustainability frameworks (Sanches et al., 2024).	<b>Moderate</b> Case evidence strong; outcomes weak.
<b>O4</b> Professional identity	Clear shift from neutral custodian to civic educator (Roncaglia, 2018; Adewojo et al., 2024; Yap et al., 2024); neutrality-activism tension unresolved; institutional constraints limit role enactment (Johnston, 2023; Willenborg & Detmering, 2025).	<b>Moderate</b> Strong qualitative; quantitative data absent.
<b>O5</b> Educational methodologies	Gamification and escape rooms outperform didactic instruction on engagement (Cho et al., 2023; Wedlake et al., 2024); SIFT and ACRL frameworks effective (Hanz & Kingsland, 2020); adult populations outside formal education remain critically underserved (Boyer et al., 2024).	<b>Moderate</b> Short-term promising; longitudinal studies absent.

**Moderate** **Low-Moderate** = evidence quality ratings

Across all five objectives the evidence is consistent in direction but limited in depth. Objective 1: library-led interventions produce documented short-term improvements in information literacy skills a 23 percent average post-assessment gain (Meena, 2024) and measurable gains using ACRL/SIFT frameworks (Hanz & Kingsland, 2020) yet no included study provides longitudinal evidence that skill gains translate into changed behaviour in real-world social media use; the intention–behaviour gap (Katsaounidou et al., 2025) is the central evidentiary weakness of the field. Objective 2: AI integration remains largely conceptual, with staff training deficits cited by 56 percent of librarians as a critical constraint (Jahangir, 2025); AI cannot currently serve as a primary counter-disinformation mechanism in libraries. Objective 3: multi-institutional partnerships consistently outperform standalone library programming (Haigh et al., 2021; Tripodi et al., 2023), yet most are project-based and lack sustainability frameworks (Sanchez et al., 2024). Objective 4: a clear directional shift from neutral custodian to civic educator is documented but contested and unevenly enacted; professional codes of ethics have not kept pace with demands (Vicente, 2024; Roncaglia, 2018). Objective 5: gamified formats outperform didactic instruction on engagement and reflective outcomes (Cho et al., 2023; Wedlake et al., 2024), while adult populations outside formal education remain critically underserved (Boler et al., 2024).

## 7. Discussion

### 7.1 The Evidential Ceiling and What It Means for Policy

Across all five objectives, the review found that the quality of evidence systematically fell short of what would be needed to substantiate the strong claims made in the promotion of the library's capacity to counter disinformation. This is not primarily a criticism of library planning, but a structural observation of what the existing evidence base can and cannot do. Short-term skills gains are real. The translation from acquiring skills to acting out the habits of verification in an authentic social media context is not demonstrated in all included studies. This gap is directly political: investment in library literacy programming should be calibrated to what the evidence supports - a meaningful but limited contribution to information resilience - rather than an aspirational framing of libraries as primary antidiscrimination tools. Young et al. (2021) identifies the lack of a coordinated research agenda as the most important gap in the field; without longitudinal behavioural evidence, practitioners cannot identify which interventions merit scaling up and which should be reconsidered. The most pressing priority for library scholarship is not more programmatic descriptions, but rigorous longitudinal evaluations using naturalistic observation.

### 7.2 Repositioning the Knowledge Armory: Libraries as Nodes, Not Bulwarks

The “knowledge armory” framing has served a useful rhetorical purpose in elevating library contributions to the policy conversation about disinformation. The risk is that it has also encouraged expectations disproportionate to what libraries can realistically deliver — and that these inflated expectations divert policy attention from structural interventions more capable of addressing information weaponisation at scale. Platform algorithm transparency requirements, AI content provenance standards, electoral integrity legislation, and public media investment operate at the systemic level where disinformation is produced and amplified; library programming operates at the individual and community level where it is received. Both levels matter. But the comparative evidence from effective disinformation-resilient contexts (Chang & Lin, 2026; Aliagan & Daranijo, 2025) consistently shows that resilience derives from distributed institutional networks in which libraries are essential but bounded participants — not from libraries acting as the primary line of defence. As Figure 2 illustrates, the distributed ecosystem model is not merely preferable; it is structurally necessary. Libraries are most valuable as trusted community connectors, equitable access providers, and embedded partners in broader civic ecosystems; they are least well-positioned as standalone counter-disinformation agencies operating at machine speed.

## 8. Conclusion

This review set out to answer whether libraries can function as effective knowledge armories against the weaponisation of social media. The answer is: partially, conditionally, and only as one node within a larger institutional network. Libraries possess genuine and irreplaceable assets — public trust, information professional expertise, physical presence in communities underserved by purely digital interventions, and a constitutional commitment to intellectual freedom. The evidence supports investment in interactive literacy programming, lateral reading instruction, community partnership models, and face-to-face verification support for digitally excluded populations. These contributions are real and should not be dismissed.

But the three core problems identified in the introduction remain unsolved by the literature examined here. The scale mismatch between machine-speed disinformation production and human-intensive library response has not narrowed. The intention-behaviour gap — the failure of skill gains to translate into changed behaviour in real-world settings — has not been addressed by any intervention in the corpus. The professional neutrality-versus-activism tension has not been resolved by updated ethics codes or institutional policy. Acknowledging these limits is not defeatist; it is the precondition for directing resources, research, and policy attention to where they can most effectively reduce the harm that weaponised information causes in democratic life. Libraries are essential participants in that effort. They are not, and cannot be asked to be, its primary institution.

## Ethics Declaration

This study did not require ethical clearance, as it did not involve human participants, personal data, or any form of sensitive information. All data used in this research were obtained from publicly available sources.

## AI Declaration

AI tools were used in a limited capacity to support language refinement and editing during the preparation of this paper. The intellectual content, analysis, and conclusions presented are the sole responsibility of the author.

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